



GAVIN NEWSOM
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

The Honorable Robert Hertzberg, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water
State Capitol, Room 5046
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB-1017 (Allen) – Commercial fishing: drift gill net shark and swordfish fishery

April 5, 2018

Dear Senator Hertzberg,

I am writing to express my support for SB-1017 (Allen), which advances the state's leadership in promoting sustainable fisheries and protecting marine wildlife.

SB-1017 directs the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to develop a voluntary Drift Gillnet (DGN) permit buyback program – which could be funded through a combination of federal, state, or private funding – and restricts future permit transfers solely to entities that retire permits. The bill also increases the DGN permit fee, requires 100 percent observer coverage of vessels using drift gillnets, and introduces “hard caps” on bycatch in this fishery.

Drift gillnets indiscriminately capture swordfish and other, non-target species, resulting in a fishery where bycatch vastly exceeds swordfish landings.¹ This high bycatch rate poses an unacceptable risk to populations of iconic or threatened marine species, such as sea turtles, whales, dolphins, sea lions, and sharks. In the 2016-2017 season, observers noted that on 160 of the fishery's 714 net deployments, drift gillnets killed 10 Short-Beaked Common Dolphins, 6 Northern Right Whale Dolphins, 34 Blue Sharks, 29 Common Molas, and 1 Sea Lion.¹ These figures represent mortality resulting from just 22 percent of the fishery's effort last year, suggesting a substantially higher rate of bycatch across the industry.

Increased observer coverage and hard caps were previously considered and adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) in 2015. However, the National Marine Fisheries Service, which issues final approval of PFMC policies, rejected these provisions in June 2017. This decision perpetuates an ineffective 30 percent (or less) observer coverage of the DGN fishery, and allows unrestricted fishing irrespective of incidental bycatch that includes endangered marine species. In the absence of leadership and environmental stewardship from federal regulatory bodies, the state has a responsibility to ensure it issues fishing permits under terms that protect non-target species.

¹http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/fishery_management/swr_observer_program/drift_gillnet_catch_summaries/observeddgncatch2016-2017.pdf

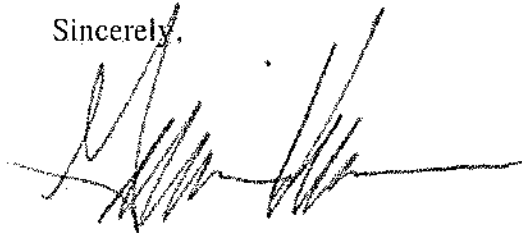


This bill also builds upon collaborative efforts by CDFW, the fishing industry, and environmental NGOs to develop solutions that reduce bycatch while bolstering the industry's viability for participants. Developing a phase-out program will provide an incentive for the industry to turn away from an unsustainable gear type and facilitate adoption of modern gear that reduces bycatch. These incentives and protections for the industry are essential to any effort to address bycatch mortality associated with California's swordfish fishery. Just as the state's policies on climate change have enabled us to aggressively reduce greenhouse gas emissions while promoting economic growth, improving the environmental sustainability of the swordfish industry should not happen at the expense of the fishery's economic sustainability.

California's iconic marine species have far greater value if left alive and thriving than if they are caught and discarded as bycatch. These species play a significant role in the health of marine ecosystems, contribute tremendous value to eco-tourism, and have inherent value as charismatic species that are loved by Californians young and old. For these reasons, 86 percent of Californians support efforts to protect wildlife by developing a more sustainable fishery that uses less harmful gear types.²

For the reasons outlined above, I encourage your support of SB-1017 (Allen), which will provide a comprehensive strategy to advance a sustainable swordfish fishery. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

GAVIN NEWSOM
Lieutenant Governor
State of California

CC:

The Honorable Ben Allen, Senator, California Senate District 26

² <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/analysis/2016/08/03/new-poll-californians-support-transition-to-less-wasteful-gear-for-catching-swordfish>